**Just do it: Why get distracted by courses and workshops in the PhD?**
Margaret Kiley, The Australian National University, 18 June 2014

**Proposal**
A curriculum model provides an excellent framework for the education of future researchers, particularly an aligned curriculum which is one where

- The learning activities and assessment strategies align with the aims and espoused learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003)
- So what does this mean for doctoral education?

A possible doctoral curriculum

**Aims**
I suggest that the aim of the Australian PhD is to educate candidates so they can:

- produce quality research
- be well rounded researchers who can clearly articulate the knowledge and skills that they have developed during candidature
- identify how their doctoral education supports future endeavours including employment, career development and contribution to society, and
- know the world and themselves as learners and researchers

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does this fit with the ANU’s vision?</th>
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<td>Are some of the aims more important than others?</td>
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<td>Is there anything additional or specific to: The ANU? A discipline? An inter-disciplinary approach?</td>
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<td>Would these aims be broadly known and supported by ANU staff and candidates?</td>
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<td>Does the ANU’s assessment align with the espoused aims?</td>
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Learning outcomes
The Australian Qualifications Framework (2013, pp 64-65) states that successful doctoral graduates (Level 10) will have the following knowledge, skills and application:

Knowledge
• A substantial body of knowledge at the frontier of a field of work or learning, including knowledge that constitutes an original contribution
• Substantial knowledge of research principles and methods applicable to the field of work or learning

Skills
• Cognitive skills to demonstrate expert understanding of theoretical knowledge and to reflect critically on that theory and practice.
• Cognitive skills and use of intellectual independence to think critically, evaluate existing knowledge and ideas, undertake systematic investigation and reflect on theory and practice to generate original knowledge.
• Expert technical and creative skills applicable to the field of work or learning.
• Communication skills to explain and critique theoretical propositions, methodologies and conclusions.
• Communication skills to present cogently a complex investigation of originality or original research for external examination against international standards and to communicate results to peers and the community.
• Expert skills to design, implement, analyse, theorise and communicate research that makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge and/or professional practice.

Application of knowledge and skills
• Intellectual independence.
• Initiative and creativity in new situations and/or for further learning.
• Full responsibility and accountability for personal outputs.
• Plan and execute original research.
• Ongoing capacity to generate new knowledge, including in the context of professional practice.

How does this fit the ANU’s anticipated outcomes?
• Are there other learning outcomes that should be included?
• How does the ANU ensure that all candidates have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and application as outlined?
• Does the assessment at the ANU align with the learning outcomes?

Prerequisites
• Should we expect that all candidates start candidature “research ready” and able to “hit the ground running”? Or
• Should we expect that candidates are “ready to learn how to be researchers” and that the doctorate is a time to educate candidates to be able to undertake research?

Where do you/the ANU stand with regard to
• Researcher readiness?
• Researcher education?
• Does this vary across disciplines?
Learning Activities/Content
Keeping in the mind: the aims of the doctorate, the learning outcomes and the prerequisites:

- What learning activities should be provided for candidates? For example...
  - Advanced disciplinary knowledge?
  - Introductory research methods and skills?
  - Advanced research methods?
  - Generic skills e.g. teamwork, project management?
  - Employability skills?
  - Other?

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<td>• Is there a need for any additional development for some/all candidates?</td>
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<td>• What might the content be?</td>
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<td>• Does it align with: The aims of the doctorate? The learning outcomes? The prerequisites?</td>
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Pedagogy/teaching approaches (NOTE: this is the focus of the July talk)
Do our traditional models of research supervision, particularly 1:1 model in some disciplines provide what is needed for doctoral learning?

Are there creative/alternative ways in which we can assist candidates with learning e.g.

- Effective panels
- Peers
- Collaborations across research groups

Needs assessment and learning plans allow candidates and supervisors to:

1. Understand what is expected of learners at the various stages of their program
2. Assess her/his strengths and existing knowledge and skill against expectations
3. Use some form of judgment re the quality e.g. Expert/competent/beginner
4. Identify those areas where additional skill/knowledge required
5. Develop a learning plan for various stages

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<td>• What are some of the creative learning opportunities provided for candidates outside the supervisory relationship?</td>
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<td>• Do candidates and supervisors recognise these alternatives as “legitimate”?</td>
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<td>• Do these approaches align with the: aims, learning outcomes, prerequisites, learning activities?</td>
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Assessment
The mantra is that “Assessment drives learning”. Does this hold true for doctoral education? At an institutional and national level does our current doctoral assessment align with the aims, learning outcomes?

The notion of alignment would suggest that different forms of assessment might be appropriate if candidates engaged in different learning experiences through their programme and that there were different aims for the programme outcomes. Kiley (2009, 38)
Are there alternatives? What might be some additional/alternative forms of assessment:

- Self assessment/feedback?
- Milestones that include assessable activities
- Assessment of key activities during candidature?
- A portfolio?
- An oral component?
- Requiring a number of publications?
- Thesis by compilation?
- Exegesis?
- Or: “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it”

**What might this mean for the ANU**

- The ANU used to undertake oral examinations: could/should there be a return to this: Why? What would an oral offer?
- Are their alternative forms of assessment that would align more closely with the ANU aims and espoused learning outcomes?

**Evaluation**

- How do we know if it is “working”?
- Nationally we have the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ)
- Does this tell us anything about the “Curriculum”?
- Does our current focus on candidate satisfaction, attrition and completion times and rates tell us enough?
- What might be appropriate forms of evaluation?

**What happens at the ANU?**

- How do the current forms of evaluation assist: Supervisors, candidates, heads of program, The University management?
- Are there additional/alternative evaluation strategies that could be used e.g. Benchmarking, annual evaluations by candidates/staff, exit surveys of withdrawing candidates?

**References**


Vitae (UK) Researcher Development Framework [https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework-planner](https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework-planner)